



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR
OF THE GAMBIA TO THE HOLY SEE***

Saturday, 28 November 1992

Mr Ambassador,

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you and to accept the Letters of Credence by which His Excellency Alhaji Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara has appointed you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of The Gambia to the Holy See. I am grateful for the President's cordial greetings and ask you kindly to assure him and all the people of The Gambia of my continued prayers for the progress, peace and prosperity of your country. Your visit today to the Vatican reminds me vividly of my Pastoral Visit to The Gambia earlier this year, where I was received with warm hospitality. The fruitful and friendly relations between The Gambia and the Holy See, to which Your Excellency has graciously referred, have their foundation in the shared belief that the dignity and rights of the human person must be constantly defended and fostered.

The Gambia is known as a country in which peaceful relations exist between its Christian and Muslim citizens, a harmony made possible by distinguishing "the domains proper to religion and to political society" (John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace 1991*, 4). In a world where religious freedom is still sometimes lacking, The Gambia guarantees the inalienable right to follow one's conscience and to profess and practise one's own faith, individually or within a community. National unity is protected when citizens and governments unequivocally respect religious freedom as the "cornerstone of the structure of human rights" (John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace 1988*). More than mere tolerance, religious freedom, accompanied by specific rights, is an essential quality of a just society in which believers and their communities worship, witness and work without fear of repression or discrimination. In a multi-religious society like The Gambia, Christians and Muslims must together defend common human and spiritual values, if the nation's integral development is to be served and promoted.

As Your Excellency has stated, a more realistic exchange between North and South should be pursued so that resources can be shared between the more prosperous and the disadvantaged nations. For justice and peace to prevail, international solidarity must replace exploitation. The wealthier nations are called to show "a sense of moral responsibility for the other nations, so that a real international system may be established which will rest on the foundation of the equality of all peoples" (John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 39). While financial help and technical advice can come from outside, it remains, at the same time, the obligation of each nation to plan for and implement its own development. As I said during my visit to Banjul, Africans should be "the principal artisans of their own development" (John Paul II, *Welcoming Ceremony at Yundum International Airport in Banjul, The Gambia*, 5). I am confident that The Gambia will continue to advance in this direction, working for economic and social progress that is truly respectful of the dignity and rights of its citizens.

Although The Gambia lives in peace, nearby Liberia is still being ravaged by a fratricidal war in which atrocities and destruction continue unchecked. The Holy See encourages the multinational efforts of those West African nations which are seeking to bring an end to this terrible conflict. Any enduring solution to civil strife must ultimately be founded on an acknowledgment of the unity of the human family and the equal dignity of all its members. It is clear that the persistence of age-old rivalries will continue to frustrate efforts towards development. If peaceful means such as dialogue and negotiation are to take the place of senseless and devastating conflicts on African soil it is necessary that Africans revive their sense of communal solidarity and extend it to all men and women, who have their origin from the same God (John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace 1989*, 3).

As the Church pursues her primary religious mission, she has not neglected active involvement in fostering the overall well-being of the Gambian people. Catholic pastors, religious and lay men and women, inspired by the love of God, have worked zealously on behalf of all, especially those needing medical assistance and education. I assure Your Excellency that the members of the Catholic community will continue to contribute their tireless efforts in the service of the common good.

Mr Ambassador, I offer you my good wishes for the success of your mission. As you take up your responsibilities as the diplomatic representative of your country to the Holy See, please know that the various offices of the Roman Curia will readily help you in fulfilling your duties. Upon you, and upon the leaders and people of The Gambia, I cordially invoke the abundant blessings of the Most High God.

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